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Fifty-eighth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE FIRST PART (PUBLIC)* OF THE 27th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Friday, 5 April 2002, at 10.25 a.m.

Chairperson: Mr. JAKUBOWSKI (Poland)

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* The summary record of the second part (closed) of the meeting appears as document E/CN.4/2002/SR.27/Add.1.

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The meeting was called to order at 10.25 a.m.

ORGANIZATION OF THE WORK OF THE SESSION (agenda item 3) (continued)

1. The CHAIRPERSON said that the Expanded Bureau recommended that a Special Sitting of the Commission should be held that afternoon to consider the statement by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the human rights situation in the occupied Palestinian territories.

2. Ms. GERVAIS-VIDRICAIRE (Canada) said that her delegation had serious concerns regarding the proposal and seriously questioned the utility of holding a Special Sitting on the issue under agenda items 5 and 8. Not only had everyone already had a chance to make their views known but the Security Council had debated the issue at length over the previous two days and passed resolution 1403 (2002). It was also necessary to consider the time factor and the fact that the Commission was already falling behind schedule.

3. Despite its serious concerns, her delegation would not block approval of the Bureau's proposal but sincerely hoped that all participants would use the time constructively and not further inflame an already grave and complex situation. The delegations of the United States of America and Australia wished to associate themselves with her statement.

4. Mr. AKRAM (Pakistan) said that, while he welcomed the proposal to hold a Special Sitting, he felt that the time allocated was insufficient to discuss a situation of great importance which was escalating on a daily basis. The Commission's objective must be to try to find a balanced set of words that would promote respect for human rights rather than inflame the situation.

5. Mr. ARENALES FORNO (Guatemala) said that an additional debate would only complicate an already complex issue and would not promote the cessation of violence or the recommencement of negotiations. A Special Sitting would only lead to further inflammatory accusations and would do nothing to promote negotiations or peace for the benefit of the Palestinian and Israeli populations. His delegation's fears had already been confirmed the previous day when a draft resolution had been submitted by Pakistan on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC). That draft resolution on agenda item 4, like the five other draft resolutions, took the elements of the conflict out of context and ignored the responsibility of the Palestinian Authority. He hoped that, if the Special Sitting went ahead, it would not impede the implementation of the Security Council resolutions or the peace initiatives launched by certain States.

6. Mr. RAMLAWI (Observer for Palestine), having thanked the Chairperson and the Expanded Bureau for the proposal, said that the Commission's work was based on the principles of human rights and it was therefore surprising to hear representatives say that consideration of the matter would not help to achieve peace or to stop violence. The Commission, which represented the conscience of the world community, was surely the correct forum for a debate on the High Commissioner's statement. If it was not, then it was difficult to see where and when violations of human rights could be considered. If the Commission really wanted to see peace in

the region then it needed to consider the reasons for the absence of peace - the violence and terrorism being committed against the Palestinian people who had no army and no tanks with which to resist. Peace was possible, but would come about only if Israel wanted it.

7. The CHAIRPERSON said that, if he heard no objection, he would take it that the Commission wished to hold a Special Sitting at 3 p.m. that afternoon.

8. It was so decided.

STATEMENT BY THE MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF ESTONIA

9. Ms. OJULAND (Estonia) said that she was proud that Estonia, despite its small size, had a role to play in the promotion of human rights. Her Government attached great importance to the establishment of the International Criminal Court as a crucial step towards strengthening international law and human rights and the Estonian Parliament had ratified the Statute of Rome in December 2001. It was vital that the Statute should be ratified by as many States as possible since only universal acceptance would make the Court an effective and useful tool.

10. Another issue of growing importance was the protection of the rights of indigenous peoples, and her Government had been pleased to see significant advances made such as the establishment of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in the United Nations system. Similarly, although progress towards the final formulation remained slow, the United Nations draft declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples would ultimately contribute a further positive step in the right direction. Estonia shared a long and rich history with the Finno-Ugric and Uralic peoples and her Government was making efforts to maintain and develop ties with them, while also promoting their cultures and languages.

11. Associated with respect for the rights of indigenous peoples was development cooperation, a concept which had become an inseparable part of her Government's foreign policy. Estonia had acquired useful experience in the field of establishing a democratic society and of developing a stable socio-economic environment which it was currently sharing with other countries. It was also prepared to provide humanitarian assistance in response to natural disasters, was ready and able to play a greater role as an international donor and was anxious to participate more actively in international discussions to help the achievement of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals.

12. To achieve a fully harmonized society, it was necessary to create an environment of mutual trust and respect, which was why, since 1998, her Government had been pursuing a policy to integrate the non-Estonian speaking population into Estonian society. The programme was based on internationally recognized human rights concepts and focused on two processes: the systematic social harmonization of Estonian society based on universal democratic values, knowledge of the official State language and the possession of Estonian citizenship, and the creation of conditions for maintaining ethnic differences based on recognition of the cultural rights of ethnic minorities. Her Government hoped that the result would be a truly multicultural society characterized by cultural pluralism and a strong common core.

13. Her Government had also taken steps to promote gender equality. Its annual Action Plan paid particular attention to reconciling family and working life and promoting women's entrepreneurship and equal pay for work of equal value and included a strategy for dealing with the problems of elderly women.

14. Information and communication technology (ICT) also had a role to play in the development and promotion of human rights, which were closely connected with the concepts of good and open governance, open markets and good economic performance. Since regaining its independence, Estonia had been making strenuous efforts to develop information technology with the result that it was among the 20 most computerized nations in the world. It had adopted one of the world's most radical laws concerning freedom of public information and a wide range of previously confidential official information had been placed in the public domain.

15. Like other countries, however, Estonia was concerned about the negative effects of the Internet and her delegation had played a role in the drafting of the Council of Europe Convention against Cyber-Crime. Her Government considered that, if appropriate policies were implemented, the digital divide could become a digital dividend. Consequently, it wholeheartedly endorsed and would actively participate in United Nations plans to assist all Member States in improving their ICT infrastructure. Such efforts would be another of Estonia's modest yet sincere contributions to building a stable world community in which human rights were respected, promoted and protected.

The public part of the meeting rose at 11.05 a.m.